

# A CENTURY OLD HUNT For the WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS BURIED TREASURE

**ENOUGH Digging Done for the Loot of Captain Kidd to Cut Through the Panama Canal—A Folly That Never Seems to Wane, Although the Modest Captain Was Not Much of a Pirate and Hid Only a Little of His Plunder.**

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

No story of buried treasure the world ever has had has appealed more strongly to the imagination of man or held first place more securely than that of the plunder of Captain Kidd. For more than two centuries the search for the gold and the jewels the pirate sent ashore when he felt that his career on sea was nearly ended has been going on. Hardly a bit of land, from the Virginia Capes to the St. Lawrence's mouth, that Kidd's name has been connected with but has been gone over. How many expeditions Gardner's Island has had is hard to say, but for 100 years never a year went by without at least one party of treasure-hunters visiting there. Block Island, Narragansett Bay points, the Delaware Bay country and Chesapeake districts have been ripped and torn by pick and spade at various times by men who have believed they were about to solve the great secret and in solving it become immensely rich. Staid Boston and Central Park, New York, have been torn up in various places at various times by treasure-seekers.

**A Treasure Find.**  
Strange how this buried treasure belief holds sway. On an island in Long Island Sound a few years ago some boys from the New Haven Y. M. C. A. had a summer camp. One day the boys found an old, weather-stained, badly faded chart, which, with much difficulty, they deciphered. It bore the name of William Kidd and a date way back in the seventeenth century.

By this chart it was plain that the pirate's treasure was buried on the very island upon which the boys were camped. The lines on the chart were faint, but the writing was queer indeed, but the boys somehow made out that by measuring so many fathoms from such a point and so many fathoms from still another point they would find the spot whereon to start to dig.

Never did boys search for treasure more earnestly than did those New Haven lads. Perhaps their ideas were centred on pirates and pirates' gold just then, for there had been much talk of pirates ever since the summer camp had been established. Never was there a boy who was worth a continental who not only had a sneaking admiration for pirates bold, but longed to have a chance at the game himself.

Just what boy found that Captain Kidd chart on that Y. M. C. A. island or what other youngster uncovered the great chest in which a lot of treasure was discovered is not important to this story. Nearly all of the

100 or more in the summer camp took part in the digging, and the excitement was intense. There were pounds and pounds of metal. Bars of gold, some one who had done a lot of reading pronounced them. There were bushes of glittering gems. These in themselves represented a king's ransom. Some of the jewels were white, some red, some green, some blue. The boys had millions in their grasp.

**Claims.**  
That night the treasure chest was guarded as treasure chests never were guarded before or since. Next day word reached the mainland of the great discovery. The newspapers got the story and the details got abroad. There was a lot made over the great find, but the fact was that Henry L. Smith, the Y. M. C. A. man in charge of the camp, bought the junk and buried the treasure chest, drew up the chart and put it where some lad was sure to find it and, then, to prepare his youthful charges for their work, introduced the subject of pirates and their hoards in the evening talk. He believed in keeping the boys busy while in the summer camp, and nothing will keep them busier than a treasure hunt, but he was rather surprised when the fathers of some of the boys put in formal claims for the treasure, this one contending his son had found the chart, this one that his firstborn had handled the spade that disclosed the chest, this one that his son directed the search and was the leader of the party. Never again will Mr. Smith bury the treasure of Captain Kidd. His explanation of the affair never caught up with the first story. Some persons still suspect he seized all the gold and precious stones for himself. It is certain that he left the New Haven territory soon after. But he is not living on his riches. He now is with the Y. M. C. A. in Brooklyn, Bedford branch.

This treasure island story is only one of hundreds of the kind. Each year the crop of stories increases. People insist in believing in Captain Kidd's treasure, and that some day some one will find it.

**My Partner, the King.**  
William Kidd probably has received more fame from a little piracy than any other sea robber in history. There are some persons who persist in asserting that the valiant captain is a much maligned man; that he never was a pirate at all, and that he was sent to the gallows simply to satisfy public clamor because some scapegoat was necessary.

It is sure that no pirate ever had more aristocratic connections than did Captain Kidd, for the King of England was his partner. So was the lead-

ing citizen of New York. So was the Chancellor of England. So was the Governor of New York and Massachusetts. So were various British noblemen. Probably politics played as much a part in branding William Kidd as a pirate as did such plundering as he was guilty of on the sea.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century there was not a more highly respected sailing man in New York colony than this same Captain Kidd. His brig, the Antigua, plied between London, the West Indies and New York. He was well to do, he hated pirates and he had the confidence and esteem of all the prominent men in New York. No one could doubt more highly of him than did Robert Livingston, founder of the great Livingston family that has given to America some brilliant men and women.

**New York's Pirates.**  
There were many good people in New York at that time who did not look upon piracy with disfavor. In fact, New York did a glorious trade with the freebooters of the sea. It bought their plunder, and it furnished them with arms and stores.

He vouched for him not only as a man of integrity, but as a brave man, too. He offered to furnish bond for Kidd's portion of the contribution to the syndicate fund and he told of the glorious work Kidd had done for England in two sea fights with the French. In one of these his arrival saved a British ship from capture by six French vessels that were closing in on the lone Englishman. His conduct in this engagement had won for him the highest praise. No one could have behaved more bravely.

**Against His Will.**  
When the proposition was made to Kidd in London to take command of the privateer to go out in pursuit of the pirates he viewed it with disfavor. Only a few years before he had married. His wife had borne him an excellent piece of property in Hanover Square, near where the Cotton Exchange now stands, and he had sold this and moved into a new house on Liberty Street, near Nassau. He was well to do, home loving, and had thought of giving up the sea. To go privateering would mean long absences from home and increased dangers. So he declined.

But the King and the King's friends in the syndicate did not intend that he should have his own way. It was intimated to him that he must accept. Otherwise he would not be permitted to leave the Thames. Hesitatingly and reluctantly he accepted. Livingston signed his bond and all the syndicators except the King put up their money to fit out the privateer. In the language of the turt the King welched. So far as is known he retained his interest, but kept his money. He had served a purpose, however. He had been a good decoy duck to get others to subscribe to the pool. A staunch thirty-gun vessel of 377 tons the Adventure, was purchased, and in April, 1696, Kidd sailed in this for New York to complete his crew and make ready for business.

For his way over to New York he captured a French ship off the Newfoundland banks, and when he reached New York he was greeted as a conqueror. The provincial assembly voted \$50 to him by way of testimonial. If ever a man got a dare-devil crew for a boat, Kidd got one for the Adventure in New York. He signed his men on the contract of no prize no pay, and he got as fine a collection of

warship deserters, pirates and rogues as the Western ocean could supply. His plan was to go to the East Indies, where pirates were numerous, and in September, 1696, he sailed out of New York Bay with the good wishes of the people and the blessings of the Earl of Bellomont, who had been appointed Governor of New York and Massachusetts.

**His Commissions.**  
The good captain had two commissions from His Gracious Majesty the King. One was to seize pirates. The second was to "apprehend, seize and take ships, vessels and goods belonging to the French King and his subjects and such other ships, vessels and goods as are or shall be liable to confiscation." This gave great latitude to Captain Kidd, but there was a clause that may be considered somewhat like a joker, in which it was specified that he should do nothing contrary to the true meaning of his commissions. As the great undertaking was one of profit purely and the syndicators were looking to Kidd to fatten their purses, this commission might be taken by him in a rather broad light, especially in view of the way things were done on the sea in those days.

Apparently Captain Kidd tried to be a real good pirate chaser for a year or so, but the fates were against him. He got into the Indian Ocean and he searched honestly and faithfully for pirates, but no pirates could he find. There were plenty of pirates in those waters, but luck was against him. Meanwhile he was having troubles of his own. That gallant band of rogues he had shipped in little old New York had various things to say to him. The days and the months were slipping by, and there was no pay for them. No prize no pay, was the contract. If anything will stir up the devil in a crew of rogues idleness surely will, and Captain Kidd's 150 or more rogues had been more or less idle for a year. Not only that, but the captain had another nightmare. Not a penny was he earning for his royal partner, or for the duke, or the chancellor, or My Lord Bellomont, or good Mr. Livingston. To remain idle in the Indian Ocean meant mutiny. To go home empty-handed meant disgrace and ruin. What was Mr. Kidd to do?

**Busy Days for Mr. Kidd.**  
Just what he did will remain a disputed point in history so long as time lasts. The captain's own report is that his mutinous crew looked him in his cabin, attacked and plundered merchant ships without regard to the flag under which they sailed, and even fought a drawn battle with a Portuguese man-of-war. This may be true or it may be false. But it is a fact that from out of the Indian Ocean came reports soon after that Mr. Kidd and his New York pirate-chasers were the busiest pirates those practical waters ever had known.

And certain it is, too, that if the captain was locked in his cabin while the crew captured some vessels, he was not locked in the cabin when the richest prize of the cruise, the Quedah Merchant, was taken. This great ship had a great store of merchandise, a lot of gold and silver, precious stones of considerable value and a miscellaneous cargo such as would delight the heart of any pirate.

How many vessels Captain Kidd and his men plundered is hard to tell. For a time they gave their attention to vessels only, and were scrupulously honest in their dealings with the mar-

chants on shore from whom they had to purchase supplies and with whom they did any trading. The Adventure leaked so badly that Kidd had to abandon her and transfer his plunder to the Quedah Merchant. He divided the spoils honestly and fairly with his men, but 100 of them deserted, and he decided to return home. As a final stroke of business he invited a lot of traders aboard the Quedah Merchant. Ostensibly he wanted to sell a lot of the merchandise of the rich ship to them, and also he was desirous of purchasing precious stones from them. They brought money and they brought gems. After he had bargained with them long enough to discover what they had in the way of money and jewels he stripped them of their wealth, ordered them off his ship, and then he sailed away.

**Homebound Bound.**  
Possibly his departure was hurried by some rumors that had reached the Indian Ocean that a squadron had been sent out by his friend, the King, to check his operations. He had been in the East two years, and had earned handsome profits for his partners, so he was not reluctant to leave.

Although half a dozen warships were scouring the seas for him he had no interference on his way back to America. He touched at two ports in the West Indies, but was refused stores as he had been proclaimed a pirate. Not only that, but he learned of an English warship being nearby in search of him. He was in a desperate plight. He did not know the temper of Lord Bellomont and Mr. Livingston in New York, and the Quedah Merchant was so foul he had no chance to escape in case a warship sighted him. An enterprising merchant of the sea named Bulton served him well at this juncture, selling to him a vessel named the San Antonio, with which he went to Curacao for supplies after transferring most of the Quedah Merchant's cargo to her. The Quedah Merchant was run up one of the rivers in San Domingo and burned.

**Hurrying Treasure.**  
From Curacao Kidd started for New York. But his conscience troubled him. At several places along the route he stopped and put men ashore. Maybe the men were anxious to get away, fearing arrest.

Maybe he put them ashore to hurry to New York with messages to his lawyer there and to his wife, and also to Lord Bellomont and Mr. Livingston. He stopped in the Chesapeake. He stopped on the Jersey shore. If the vague stories that have been told are true he put ashore treasure at every place the San Antonio stopped, and the treasure chest was buried secretly at night. Of



listed as about 1,100 ounces of gold, 2,400 ounces of silver and 17 ounces of precious stones. The total value was less than \$75,000.

## The Trial.

From Boston Kidd was taken to London. There was a great political row on there, the Outs accusing the Kings of having sent Kidd out as a pirate to enrich themselves. Even the King got his share of the blame.

For a year they kept Kidd in prison. Then he was put on trial. It was necessary, in order for the government to vindicate itself, that Kidd should hang. He did hang, but his trial was a farce. They found him guilty of murder. He had hit a mutinous sailor with a bucket and the blow fractured the sailor's skull. Then they found him guilty of piracy and several other crimes. On May 13, 1706, three days after his conviction, he was hanged.

Poor William Kidd. He has a fame he does not deserve. He became a pirate against his will and his name ever will stand as a synonym for piracy. And the farm on which he and his good wife lived now is decked with skyscrapers, in which the pirates of to-day, the pirates of finance, plan campaigns and cruises in which the treasure of the Quedah Merchant would cut out only a small figure.

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